

***Barth Society met in Chicago, Illinois October 31-November 1, 2008
and in Boston, Massachusetts November 21-22, 2008***

Our meeting in **Chicago** in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion featured our usual Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were **Keith Johnson**, Wheaton College whose lecture was entitled: “*The Invention of the Antichrist? Reconsidering Barth’s Rejection of the Analogia Entis*” and **Kevin Hector**, University of Chicago, whose lecture was entitled: “*Election and the Trinity: How My Mind Has Changed*”. The Saturday morning session featured a *Panel Discussion* of Lewis Ayres’ book, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). The panelists were: Paul D. Molnar, St. John’s University and Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University. George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided and read a response from Lewis Ayres of Duke University who was unable to attend.

Our meeting in **Boston** in conjunction with the Society of Biblical Literature featured a Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were **Michael Dempsey**, St. John’s University whose lecture was entitled: “*The Path of Total Surrender’: Karl Barth and the Spiritual Nature of Theology*” and **Joseph Mangina**, Wycliffe College whose lecture was entitled: “*Ecumenical Ecclesiology with Reference to Karl Barth*”. George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary, presided. The Saturday morning session featured a *Panel Discussion* of Lewis Ayres’ book, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). The panelists were: Paul D. Molnar, St. John’s University and Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary. Lewis Ayres of Duke University responded. George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided.

**The Fourth Annual Barth Conference will be held at Princeton Theological Seminary
June 21-24, 2009**

**This Conference Barth is entitled:
“Karl Barth on Religion and the Religions”**

**This conference is cosponsored by *The Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary*
and *The Karl Barth Society of North America*.**

**Brochures with full details about speakers, schedules and registration are
enclosed with this Newsletter.**

What follows are some summaries and some brief recaps of the lectures from Chicago and Boston.

“*The Invention of the Antichrist?*
Reconsidering Barth’s Rejection of
the Analogia Entis”

Keith L. Johnson
 Wheaton College

Johnson began by looking at Eberhard Jüngel’s argument, in *God as the Mystery of the World*, that the Protestant followers of Barth have misunderstood the *analogia entis*. Specifically, Jüngel contends that Barth’s followers are mistaken to think that, in the *analogia entis*, God and humanity are placed within a single structure of being which then makes it possible to understand God on the basis of the ordering of the created world under him. Johnson maintained that Jüngel’s argument about the Barthian misinterpretation is correct, and that, surprisingly, Barth himself would agree with it. The reason stems from the fact that Barth’s reasons for rejecting the *analogia entis* are not what most Barthians suppose. To explain why this is the case, Johnson offered three claims: (1) Barth did not reject the *analogia entis* because he believed it drew God and creature into a single “structure of being”; (2) Barth did not reject the *analogia entis* because he misinterpreted it, as many contemporary critics suppose; and (3) Barth did not change his mind about his rejection of the *analogia entis* late in his career. Each of these claims was defended during the course of the lecture.

Johnson’s account began in February 1924 with Barth’s decision, reflected in the preface to the fourth edition of his commentary on Romans, to reconsider the contours of his theology. Specifically, Johnson argued that, between 1921 and 1924, Barth’s interaction with the insights of Reformed theology as well as critical remarks by Catholic reviewers of Romans (including Erich Przywara) led him to reconsider his portrayal of God’s relationship with the world. The fruit of this reconsideration was his adoption of the *anhypostatic-enhypostatic* dogma in which the one Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, takes upon himself human nature in its entirety and lives a human life in and through it. Through this doctrine, Barth believed that he had found a way to talk about the transcendent God revealing himself in and through

concrete creaturely realities. This move, Johnson argued, marked a critical development in Barth’s theology that set up his reasons for rejecting the *analogia entis*.

It was during this same period that Przywara began to develop the *analogia entis*. Johnson argued that the doctrine took shape as Przywara’s response to World War I and its aftermath, which he believed revealed a theological crisis at the heart of European culture that had occurred, in part, because the Roman Catholic Church had failed to engage the world with the truth of the gospel. Przywara sought to correct this problem by giving the Church the theological and philosophical tools necessary to avoid such failures in the future. It was this goal that led Przywara to develop the *analogia entis* throughout the 1920’s in a series of lectures and writings. Johnson then offered a close analysis of Przywara’s account of the *analogia entis* in his book, *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie* written in 1926.

Johnson explained that this book is critical for understanding Barth’s rejection of the *analogia entis* because Barth read it along with his students as part of a seminar on the theology of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Münster in the winter semester of 1929 in preparation for a visit by Przywara to that seminar. Johnson offered a close analysis of student protocols from that seminar, and on the basis of the record they provide of Barth and his students’ interaction both with Przywara’s book and with Przywara himself, he argued that Barth and his students had an accurate account of the content, meaning, and implications of Przywara’s *analogia entis*. To demonstrate this claim, Johnson provided a close reading of Barth’s portrayal of the *analogia entis* in “Fate and Idea in Theology”—delivered a few weeks after Przywara’s visit to Barth’s seminar—as well as in the lectures that make up “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life,” delivered later that same year. Johnson demonstrated that Barth did not believe that, in the *analogia entis*, God and creatures participate in some “structure of being” and that an analogy between God and creatures can be drawn on the basis of this shared participation. Rather, Barth’s worries about the *analogia entis* were based on Przywara’s assumption that what humans can know of God by reflection upon their created existence

corresponds to, and is fulfilled by, what they know of God in Jesus Christ in the Church.

For Barth, Johnson argued, this assumption is built upon a misunderstanding of the nature of divine revelation. Przywara holds that divine revelation occurs in, and connects both God's act in creation and God's act in reconciliation. Barth holds, in contrast, that the reality of human sin means that revelation must be seen in light of justification alone. The result of Przywara's broader view of revelation, as Barth sees it, is that human actions are inevitably placed in continuity with God's actions in the event of salvation. Johnson concludes, therefore, that Barth rejects the *analogia entis* because he is unwilling to accept the notion that what humans can know of God from God's act of creation stands in continuity with what they can know of God in God's justifying act in Jesus Christ, since this kind of continuity inevitably conflates divine action and human action in the Christian life. Any relationship humans have with God, for Barth, stems from our justification in Christ alone. This reason for rejecting the *analogia entis* is not the result of a misunderstanding, Johnson argued, but of an accurate account of key differences between his and Przywara's understanding of revelation, creation, and the work of Jesus Christ.

Johnson listed four implications of this reading of Barth's reasons for rejecting the *analogia entis* and explained each of them briefly. The four implications are: (1) it helps explain the motivation behind Barth's condemnation of the *analogia entis* as "the invention of the Antichrist" in the preface to *CD I/1*; (2) it helps us understand the content and the context of Barth's "change of mind" with regard to the *analogia entis*; (3) it helps us see that the alternative Barth offers to Przywara's *analogia entis* in *CD I/1* is not his final answer to the question of the nature of God's relationship to humanity; and (4) it clears away much of the confusion about his interpretation of the doctrine as well as about the changes and developments in his own view over the course of his career. Full development of each of these claims, as well as an in-depth analysis of Barth's, Przywara's, Balthasar's and Jüngel's views of the *analogia entis*, is provided in Johnson's forthcoming book, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (T&T Clark).

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"Election and the Trinity: How My Mind Has Changed"

Kevin Hector
University of Chicago

Kevin Hector began his lecture by summarizing Bruce McCormack's well known thesis regarding the relationship between the Trinity and election, namely, that in electing us as his covenant partners God determined himself to be for the human race so that he did in some sense give himself his triune being when he determined to be God for us. In this sense, election is said to be the ground of God's triunity. Hector's change of mind seemed to center on the fact that for him and for McCormack, God could have been God without us, but that when McCormack claims that we cannot say anything about this God, his thinking becomes problematic since any claim to speak about God at all is a claim about the God who is eternally the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He believes that McCormack had re-introduced the specter of a *deus absconditus* with the idea that God could be God without us but that we cannot say that the triune God could be God without us.

Citing an important text from *CD IV/2* that "The triune life of God, which is free life in the fact that it is Spirit, is the basis of His whole will and action even *ad extra*, as the living act which He directs to us" (p. 345), Hector also noted that the Trinity should not be understood to be subsequent to election; thus God's triune life is the prototype of his actions *ad extra*. Hector still seems to believe, however, that since God determined to be God for us we can say that God has never been without determining to be God for us.

Hector discussed the question of whether or not Barth believed that God's being was prior to election and concluded that such a view would be problematic since it would re-introduce the idea of a *decretum absolutum* which Barth wanted to avoid in his view of election. Hector advanced the view that the Trinity is ontologically necessary for God while election is volitionally necessary for God, claiming that God's actions for us suggest a self-imposed necessity. God therefore can be said to be God with us and thus God could not be God in any other way. In the end, it seems, in spite of his change of mind regarding what he had written

earlier about the divine freedom and election, Hector still wants to maintain that God is not free to be God without us. Exactly how this thinking can be reconciled with Barth's belief that God's actions for us do not arise as a matter of necessity out of God's being in himself, but must always be seen as free actions in which God is for us, but is not reduced to his actions for us, remains to be seen.

"Reflections on Nicaea and Its Legacy"

Paul D. Molnar

St. John's University, New York

At the Saturday morning session Paul Molnar began by noting that Lewis Ayres had done a great service for contemporary theology by demonstrating that theologians cannot suppose that eastern theology begins with the persons of the Trinity and moves toward the divine unity while western theology begins with the divine unity and moves toward the three persons. Such a supposition ignores the full equality of the divine persons in ways that lead toward subordinationism and adoptionism (what Barth called Ebionite Christology) and ultimately strips the Gospel of its saving power.

Molnar discussed Ayres' thesis that there is no single orthodox Nicene theology in the years immediately following the Council of Nicaea in 325. Rather there was what Ayres called a "pro-Nicene" theology embraced by both eastern and western theologians marked by 1) "a clear vision of the person and nature distinction, entailing the principle that whatever is predicated of the divine nature is predicated of the three persons equally and understood to be one"; 2) "clear expression that the eternal generation of the Son occurs within the unitary and incomprehensible divine being"; 3) "clear expression of the doctrine that the persons work inseparably" (*Nicaea*, 236). It is this pro-Nicene theology that holds together and expresses the main ingredients of the trinitarian faith which is so central to both Catholics and Protestants today. There is a problem, however, according to Lewis Ayres. And that problem concerns the fact that modern trinitarian theologians have only "engaged the legacy of Nicaea at a fairly shallow level" (*Nicaea*, 1, 385).

Before discussing the implications of this remark Molnar drew several parallels between Ayres' depiction of pro-Nicene theology and Barth's thinking demonstrating why he believes Barth was self-consciously pro-Nicene. First, Barth stressed that we could not explain the *how* of the inner trinitarian relations, thus giving expression to the belief that processions within the Trinity are ultimately incomprehensible even as we know them in faith and by grace. Hence in attempting to understand revelation and the mystery of the Trinity both Barth and the Nicene theologians recognized that we are dealing with an indefinable mystery. Second, Barth stressed the principle that all acts of the Trinity *ad extra* are indivisible, but that this principle had to be coordinated with the doctrine of *perichoresis* which enabled Barth to insist that one could not understand God the Father and creator apart from the Son or the Holy Spirit. In this regard Molnar mentioned the surprising number of positive references to the trinitarian theology of Augustine in Barth's writings, with the exception of course of Augustine's understanding of the *vestigium trinitatis*.

Molnar spent some time on Ayres' criticisms of contemporary theology for not engaging the real challenges that pro-Nicene theologians offer. Ayres believes that many contemporary theologians invoke the formula of the fourth century but actually reject the theological methods that produced those formulae as untenable in modernity. Contemporary theologians want to focus on the "practical" and "on the narrative of Christ's ministry as transformative of human possibility" (*Nicaea*, 389). While Ayres believed that it is indeed important to focus on ethics and on anthropological considerations, this should be done, he claimed, only while acknowledging that "contemplation of God is the source of appropriate action" (*Nicaea*, 389). Ayres contends that contemporary systematic theologians are suspicious of any attempt to "systematize accounts of God in Godself" (*Nicaea*, 390). He suggests that the focus on Jesus' ministry without a simultaneous concern for the ontological categories at the heart of Christian faith leads to the assumption that "theological practice begins not from the plain sense of Scripture but from reconstructions of Jesus as a human being like us" (*Nicaea*, 390). Here, Ayres has identified what for Barth was a major difficulty in modern theology, namely, the constant temptation to separate the form of revelation (the

humanity of Jesus) from its content (his being as the Word of God incarnate) (*CD I/1*, 390). In other words, Barth consistently insisted that to know Jesus Christ is to know the triune God and that to bypass Jesus Christ is to bypass God himself as he has made himself known and knowable to us according to the NT witness. For Barth: “. . . we have to accept the simple presupposition on which the New Testament statement rests, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son because He is (not because He makes this impression on us, not because He does what we think is to be expected of a God, but because He is). With this presupposition all thinking about Jesus, which means at once all thinking about God, must begin and end” (*CD I/1*, 415).

Molnar surveyed Ayres’ important criticisms of Rahner’s theology and others as well as social trinitarianism, expressing his agreement that much of the problem in these positions stems from an uncritical adaptation of Hegel’s thinking to the problems that gave rise to pro-Nicene theology. Ayres actually believes that Catholic trinitarian theology today presents the main lines of the revival evident in modern Protestant theology except that Catholics less often overtly embrace the Hegelian theme of God’s “becoming via an involvement with the creation” (*Nicaea*, 410). Molnar then showed how Barth’s trinitarian theology could be seen to support the conclusions reached by Ayres.

Molnar wondered why, in a book devoted to the development of fourth century trinitarian theology and its reception among contemporary theologians, there was no sustained engagement with the work of Thomas F. Torrance. He also raised a number of questions to Ayres’ presentation. The first question concerned whether or not Barth’s critique of Augustine’s *vestigia* might also apply to theologians like Basil who claimed that the image of God in the human mind is the most appropriate site for exploring God’s nature; for Barth the image of God in human beings was lost through sin and restored only in Christ and thus could be seen and understood only from him. That is why Barth was adamant that there could be no second root for trinitarian doctrine other than revelation. The second question concerned Ayres’ contention that the fourth century debates did not concern the divinity of Christ, that is, they did not concern the issue of which side of the creator/creature divide Christ should be placed. Molnar pointed out that,

according to citations from Arius presented by Ayres himself, it certainly seemed that this was exactly what the real issue was, as when Arius is said to have asserted that the Son is “‘from the things that did not exist’” and that for Arius “we should not say the Son is co-eternal” (*Nicaea*, 55). He also indicated that one of the central ingredients of pro-Nicene theology, which was to stress the importance of distinguishing the creator from the creature, also seems to argue against the theory that the fourth century debates did not concern Christ’s deity (*Nicaea*, 143, 231, 286 et. al.). Finally, Molnar suggested that Athanasius’ own statement, cited by Ayres, that “The Son, like the Father, is creator . . . because all things were created through him, he does not belong to things created” (*Nicaea*, 213) seems to suggest just the opposite of such a theory.

Molnar ended his discussion noting that while Barth thought that morally one was bound to sympathize with the Arians and not with the orthodox minority or the Eusebians, noting that the term *homoousion* could easily have led to misunderstanding along modalist or tritheist lines, he nevertheless sided with Athanasius and Augustine insisting upon the identity of nature of the Father and Son because it upheld Christ’s true divinity. Indeed Barth noted that Hilary, not without a touch of humor remarked that “If anyone does not like the phrase ‘of the same substance’, he should at least like the fact that the Arians had to reject it” (*CD I/1*, 438). Barth finally concluded that the *homoousion* “places Jesus Christ on the side of the Creator in contrast to every creature, even the highest” (*CD I/1*, 439). It also of course eliminates any hint of what Barth labeled Ebionite or Docetic Christology (*CD I/1*, 439).

“Response to Lewis Ayres’ *Nicaea and its Legacy*”

Aristotle Papanikolaou
Fordham University, Bronx New York

Aristotle Papanikolaou noted that there is much to praise in Lewis Ayres’ book, but said he would focus on questions and issues raised in the book. The first issue he discussed is the way Michel René Barnes criticized Vladimir Lossky for embracing the problematic historical view that eastern theologians begin with the persons of the Trinity

while westerners begin with the divine unity, and also for “anti-ecumenical motivations for deleting references to De Régnon” in the English translation of Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Papanikolaou was critical of Ayres for citing Barnes as support for the claim that Lossky was influenced by De Régnon’s reading of trinitarian history. Papanikolaou also noted that he defended Lossky against these charges in his book, *Being with God*, noting that Lossky actually wanted the Latin-Rite mass accepted among the Orthodox and so he was not anti-ecumenical. And he was critical of the way Ayres cited Lossky, as seeming to refer to Augustine in order to stress the unitary divine essence as related to the *filioque*, when he was actually referring to Thomas Aquinas (*Nicaea*, 365). Papanikolaou wanted to make the point that he believed he saw himself, Barnes and Ayres as all holding a view of Augustine that demonstrates the need to dismantle false readings of Augustine that unhappily categorize him in terms of East/West “category constructions”.

Other questions treated by Papanikolaou concerned: 1) whether or not the language of divine simplicity should govern our speech about God. Papanikolaou suggested that the grammar of “divine-human communion” should instead govern that speech because the notion of divine simplicity alone might not allow for divine-human communion in the incarnate Word. Even the Arians affirmed a type of divine simplicity and a notion of communion, but Athanasius insisted that because the Son is “true God” they must have a view of divine simplicity “in which the Father generates the Son”. Athanasius therefore advanced an idea of divine simplicity “that allows for divine-human communion”. And, according to Papanikolaou, the grammar of “divine communion” is also evident in the way Athanasius understands the famous passage from Proverbs 8:22, “The Lord created me as a beginning of his ways for his works”—for Athanasius this meant that mediation between creator and creatures took place through the mediation of the Son who was and is “true God”. Failure to understand this is why the “so-called ‘Arians’ misunderstand Proverbs 8:22). 2) With respect to Ayres arguments that the fourth century debates were not simply about the Son’s divinity, Papanikolaou argues that they are indeed about the Son’s divinity, but they are not just about this since, in his view, they are also debates about the simplicity of God whose being “*is* freedom to be in communion with creation through

the death and resurrection of the incarnate Son”. Papanikolaou agrees with Ayres’ view that much modern theology of the Trinity “has misrepresented the doctrine of the Trinity by forcing the doctrine into a philosophical framework”. But he also believes that Ayres’ emphasis on divine simplicity at the expense of considering divine-human communion leads to abstract speculation in a way that mirrors the contemporary theologians that he criticizes. He thinks Ayres could have been more generous “toward some contemporary theologians”.

According to Papanikolaou, Hegel “reawakened Christians to the insight that the doctrine of the Trinity is the unique Christian conceptualization of the God-world relation in which God’s being *is* freedom as love to be in communion with creation”. This, he believes, is evident in the thinking of Schelling, Fichte and Bulgakov as well as the theology of Karl Barth, especially when Barth says that God can be in relation to us because he exists as triune in himself. “As Father, Son and Spirit God is, so to speak, ours in advance” (*CD I/1*, 383). Papanikolaou contends that contemporary theologians such as Barth, Rahner and Zizioulas all saw that the doctrine of the Trinity “was the unique Christian conceptualization of God’s being as freedom to be in communion with creation, rooted in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and that this insight emerged because of modern philosophical and theological attacks on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity”.

According to Papanikolaou, then, the “grammar of divine-human communion” governs the theology of the Trinity. With this insight he expresses agreement with Ayres that “Zizioulas overstates his case” about the notion of personhood in the patristic literature being used to argue for a “relational ontology”. He believes that Zizioulas grounded personhood in the monarchy of the Father and thus could not be categorized as a social trinitarian. Nonetheless, Papanikolaou thinks that Zizioulas’ view of personhood as communion is logically implied by the doctrine of the Trinity. “Person” allowed theologians to move beyond simply identifying what was common in God toward “the very language of divine-human communion itself”. His position is “to ground the notion of personhood, both human and divine, not in the person of the Father, but in the person of the incarnate Word”. According to Papanikolaou, this is Zizioulas’ lasting insight. But it can only be retrieved if we

move away from the “historicism implied in *Nicaea and its Legacy*”. Papanikolaou admits that distortions in relational notions of personhood must be overcome, but that we still need the conceptions all the same.

Finally, Papanikolaou made a point of applauding Ayres for arguing that Augustine “is not diametrically opposed to the so-called ‘Cappadocians’”. In fact he believes that Augustine’s thought furthers a pro-Nicene position. He believes this can be seen in the work of Sergius Bulgakov, in his book *The Comforter*, where he claims that Augustine was the first to express the idea “of the Holy Trinity as Love”. This, Papanikolaou says, is an idea “wholly foreign to Eastern theology”. With this insight he concludes by once more stating that “the grammar that governs theology of the Trinity is one of divine-human communion” and so Augustine could be seen as going beyond certain pro-Nicene theologians in ways similar to Gregory of Nyssa by stressing that God’s being is “freedom to be in communion with creation”. This, he believes, is the trajectory of modern theology, in spite of its “many faults”. He agrees with Ayres that trinitarian reflection must take place without distorting the patristic tradition in a way that is faithful to the scriptural witness. But he disagrees with Ayres’ claim that the doctrine “can only make sense with those who share certain presuppositions” because this thinking represents a “retreat into an enclave and would not address the fundamental ‘why Trinity’ question”. Papanikolaou believes this question can be answered “no matter what the presuppositions” because it “makes most sense to think of God as Trinity, which, in the end, is no different than saying God’s ‘being as communion’”.

“Response from Lewis Ayres” **Duke University**

As noted above Lewis Ayres was unable to attend this session but sent his written responses which will be summarized very briefly. First, he noted that in a second edition of his book there would be differences. He would argue that neither *ousia* nor *hypostasis* describe the ultimate principle of the Trinity. Hence he would side with Lossky and Augustine against Zizioulas. He believes that Papanikolaou misunderstands the matter because he says that he is too restrictive and wants to force his

thinking into the grammar of divine-human communion. Actually, Ayres notes that what Papanikolaou is looking for is provided in Chapters twelve and thirteen of the book, *Nicaea and its Legacy*.

With regard to Molnar’s presentation, Ayres noted that he was not convinced by Thomas F. Torrance’s presentation of Athanasius. He also believes that Athanasius did not present all the pro-Nicene themes. He agrees that Barth is pro-Nicene but is unhappy with Barth’s view of analogy. He said that he sees Barth as an ally, but not as a member of the same army. He thinks a tension should govern trinitarian thinking in such a way that one would attend to theological authorities so that one could follow good doctrinal theology. Thus he embraces the idea that we should follow a great theologian’s thinking to guide our reading and interpretation of scripture.

“The Path of Total Surrender’: Karl Barth and the Spiritual Nature of Theology”

Michael T. Dempsey **St. John’s University, New York**

In his paper, Michael Dempsey argues that Karl Barth needs to be understood as a spiritual theologian of the Christian life, who grounds his understanding of theology in the being and action of the triune God while offering powerful implications for the life of faith. Far from being an outdated proponent of neo-orthodoxy, Dempsey presents Barth as a theological master whose method and form of theological argumentation set an example for a spiritual, biblical, and meditative approach to faith and theology. By concentrating on the revealed Word of God in scripture, Barth exemplifies an attitude of total submission and ceaseless prayer while appealing to the power and the presence of God’s Word and Spirit. Since theological understanding always depends upon the personal, existential encounter with God, Dempsey looks at the ways in which Barth’s theology offers practical wisdom and engaging theological descriptions of God and Christian experience in order to redirect his readers’ attention away from themselves and towards God. Properly understood, Barth’s theology is not the enemy of religious

experience, but the means through which a biblically based, doctrinal theology can learn the skills to think from a center in *Deo*. His paper is divided into four sections: 1) the literary form of Barth's spiritual theology: rhetoric and dialectic; 2) the spiritual nature of Barth's theological method; 3) the role of experience; and 4) the divine *concursus* in the spiritual life of faith, prayer, and obedience.

In the first section, Dempsey notes that one of the reasons Barth's theology has been seldom appreciated as a resource for spiritual theology has been his radical theocentrism and reputation for rhetoric and polemic. Quite simply, Barth writes in a way that is vastly different than anyone else. As Hans Frei has shown, Barth's elaborate and lengthy use of theological prose was an attempt to reconstitute a biblical and ecclesial language that had long fallen out of favor in the modern era. More recently, John Webster has argued that the strategy of Barth's style goes far beyond mere prolixity. According to Webster, the style of Barth's theological prose consists of many features of literary skill, including duplication and triplication; and words, interrogation, irony, direct address, and humor, which come together to generate a particular kind of experience. Barth's arguments are not to be understood as linear or discursive demonstrations of the universal rationality of Christian belief, but as performative celebrations that address the subject matter from a variety of different ways. Barth's hope is that the reader may be caught up in the joy and the drama of Christian faith through the revelatory and self-communicative presence of God. As Hans Urs von Balthasar has noted, the style of Barth's theological prose is beautiful, even lovely, not simply because Barth was a greater writer, but because his theology bears witness, with contagious enthusiasm, to a reality that epitomizes style, "since God is its author."

Barth also employs a steady stream of dialectical descriptions that juxtapose a series of statements and counter-statements about God and human beings without resolving their tension in a synthesis of his own theoretical construction. For Barth, dialectic is rather a way to offer descriptions of God and faith in order to eschew any theoretical finality in order to clear a direct space to allow God to deal directly with us. Recognizing that we are always "drawing upon the ocean" (*CD II/1*, 581), Barth

simply offers a healthy "oscillation between two extremes" that frequently emphasizes the side most recently neglected. In this, Dempsey argues, Barth is showing that we are never caught in the destabilizing dialectic of the *diastasis*, but are rather always working within the limitations of language while recognizing that our hope and confidence does not rest with our conceptual manipulations, but with God who alone heals our divisions through the peace and security of his active presence.

Next, Dempsey explores the implications of Barth's understanding of theology as "the speaking of God from God in the presence of God unto God's glory" (*CD I/1*, 3) in terms of the active presence of God's Word and Spirit. Theology, then, for Barth, is not just human talk about God's action in the past or the promise of the future. It is talk about God as it appeals to God in the present for the decisive content and power of its speech. "Not even for one moment," Barth writes, "can we forget that, when and in so far as we do think and speak the truth in Church proclamation or dogmatics, it is God Himself and alone who, using man as His servant . . . has actually thought His thoughts and spoken His Word" (*CD I/2*, 884). Hence, if all theology requires "an actual determination and claiming of man by the active God" (*CD I/1*, 19) in which the Word of God "gives itself to us" and "forces itself upon us" (*CD I/1*, 91-92), then the only possible method for theological reflection remains a life of faith, prayer, and submission for theologian and reader alike.

Inevitably, this is going to have the most concrete implications for the life of faith and Christian experience. Essentially, Dempsey argues, it means that Christian faith must consist in cultivating the habit of total surrender to the controlling power of the object of faith. If we are not prepared to do this, Dempsey argues, if we are not prepared to let our own life be controlled, judged, assailed, and disquieted by the Word of God, then, inevitably, we will adopt an attitude of sinful self-sufficiency. This will not only obscure our own sin and need for grace but will also undermine the divine freedom at the heart of theological reflection, as well as secularize theology by removing the need for God's active voice and judgment. Clearly, then, for Barth, theology consists in cultivating the spiritual habit of turning to and surrendering oneself before God with the humble hope and gentle confidence that God will enter our thinking to make God's own meaning

manifest. Yet, when and to the extent that this happens, our theology itself will not only consist in the “openness to receive new truth” but will also become a sign and a demonstration of the truth, which “no technique or toil can compel, but for which we can only pray” (CD I/2, 867, 776).

Thus against all characterizations of Barth as the enemy of religious experience, Dempsey displays Barth’s remarkable sensitivity to the role of God in Christian faith and experience. Essentially, this experience must be understood as the active determination of our faith in all its complexity, ambiguity, and freedom by a prior divine determination of grace. The Christian life, as well as Christian theology, must therefore consist in “letting oneself be continually led” by God while giving up the illusion of self-sufficiency and control in order to find one’s true self-determination from the free and gracious prior determination of God.

Dempsey concludes by treating the intersection of divine and human agency in Barth’s theology of the *concursum Dei*. Here, Dempsey notes that Barth returns to earlier arguments from his doctrine of the Trinity and divine perfections by grounding his discussion in the being and action of God *in se* and *pro nobis*. To grasp what it means to call God the *causa prima*, for Barth, everything depends on the specific God with whom we are dealing. The God of the Christian doctrine of providence is the Father of Jesus Christ who rules the world according to the wisdom, power, and goodness of his free grace, integrating and coordinating the free and autonomous actions of creatures with the coming of God’s kingdom. This God, therefore, cannot be confused with a general notion of a supreme being nor likened to a tyrant that begrudges the freedom of the creature. Rather, returning to his argument on the divine transcendence and aseity, Dempsey shows that Barth defends the divine determination of genuine human freedom on the basis of God’s being and action in himself. Since God is love and freedom in himself, God is thus free to work both above *and* within the natural powers of the creature. It is thus the radical transcendence *and* immanence of God that enables God to work in and through the agency of creatures. And the reason that God’s sovereign control does not violate genuine creaturely freedom and autonomy is because “the divine and creaturely subjects are not like or similar, but unlike. They are unlike because their basis and constitution as subjects are quite different

and therefore absolutely unlike” (III/3, 103). Essentially, for Barth, “God is love in and of Himself and in the overflowing of this love He loves the creature” (III/3, 107), so that the freedom and love of God continue to form the basis of human freedom and love in the world in a corresponding and analogous way as God himself works freely through the work of his creatures.

Yet, there is a difference between understanding the concept of divine *concursum* and the reality itself. This knowledge is possible, for Barth, “only in the light of the operation of the divine subject” that comes with the personal encounter with grace (III/3, 134). Hence, while Barth begins with a meditation on the being and action of God in himself, he concludes by pointing out the great obstacle to this belief is not intellectual, but spiritual. It is possibly only by giving up the fear-complex which suggests that God is a stranger or enemy to the creature.

In the end, then, Dempsey concludes that, for Barth, the perception of the truth of God’s providential control over human freedom and autonomy depends neither upon conceptual manipulations nor logical deductions of God’s being from human experience or temporal logic. Rather, it is a matter of the divine election of grace which alone purifies our faith and gives us the strength to relinquish our desire to domesticate God into something that makes sense to our preconceived notions and logical limits. For this reason, we can never understand *how* God’s grace is sovereign over genuine freedom and autonomy, but can only confess it with the strength, joy, and the conviction that God alone may provide, thus making Christian faith and theology, ultimately, a spiritual matter of faith in which human beings are lifted up to God’s side and given a share in God’s sovereign rule over creation in and through their own created freedom and love, for both God and others.

At the Saturday morning session in Boston **Katherine Sonderegger** offered her comments on Lewis Ayres’ *Nicaea and Its Legacy* while **Paul Molnar** presented his comments on the same volume once again. This time Lewis Ayres was present and a very lively and interesting discussion ensued. Kate Sonderegger noted that in Ayres’ provocative summons to contemporary systematic theology in the last chapter of his book, Barth was strikingly absent. So too was DeLubac. Sonderegger said these two theologians should be

seen as exceptions to the rule and thus should be understood as supporting a pro-Nicene position. She mentioned that Ayres could have used different images from the early tradition to explain Augustine's view of the incarnation. And she discussed Barth's view of the Logos and how he understood the fact that the Logos marked off Jesus' place since he was in the beginning with God.

Lewis Ayres responded noting that while he generally agreed with T. F. Torrance's thinking expressed in his important book, *The Trinitarian Faith*, he was not convinced by his account of Athanasius since Torrance attempted to harmonize diverse strategies. In Ayres' thinking Athanasius did not articulate all the pro-Nicene emphases; he only once describes the Trinity as *homoousion*; while the Son is *homoousion* for Athanasius, Ayres believes that Athanasius never says that the Father is *homoousion* with the Son. Ayres stressed that Athanasius's achievement must be seen within the context of the fourth century. With regard to Barth, Ayres noted that he had some quibbles with Barth's epistemology and so he wondered just how far Barth would want to go with a pro-Nicene culture. Ayres wanted to stress one of the themes of his book which is that theology is learned by paying attention to good theologians. There was an interesting discussion of natural theology and of Augustine's thinking. Ayres said that he personally rejected natural theology entirely. He objected to those who reject a *logos asarkos*, stressing that this was an important notion for Augustine. He saw this as one area where Protestants and Catholics disagreed. There was an interesting exchange of ideas on this subject. At the end of the discussion it was agreed that Barth's theology might well be considered an exception to the kinds of difficulty Ayres was criticizing in contemporary systematic theology in his last chapter. All in all it was an excellent exchange of ideas. The session was well attended.

What follows is an interesting, instructive and important Christmas reflection offered by **Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury** and first published in the London Telegraph commemorating the 40th anniversary of Karl Barth's death on December 10, 1968.

Put aside your principles
Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury
21 Dec 2008

Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, says the first Christmas changed how everyone thinks about universal human dignity

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3885188/Put-aside-your-principles-and-remember-all-you-need-is-love.html>

Forty years ago this month, one of the greatest religious thinkers of the 20th century died. In his long career in Switzerland and Germany, he had published millions of words, played a crucial role in inter-church discussions across Europe, denounced nuclear weaponry – and, before the war, done most of the work in drafting for the German churches a statement of open defiance against the Third Reich. Some of his most powerful lectures were delivered in the bombed-out ruins of the theological department in Bonn when the war had ended and he was able to return to Germany after being driven out by Hitler.

Karl Barth was, by any standards, one of the most deeply principled intellectuals of the age, someone who was quite ready to pay the price of conscience in an insane and tyrannical state. It was probably only his Swiss citizenship that saved his life. So it's all the more surprising to read some of his words in a Christmas sermon preached in 1931, where he says that the real good news of Christmas is that we are given permission to be free from our principles. We need, he says, "to be able to live with principles, but we must also be able to live without them".

Why is this good news – and what has it got to do with Christmas, with this Christmas in particular and our current anxieties and hopes?

What Barth saw beginning to take its grip on Germany in 1931 was a system of "principle" that worked quite consistently once you accepted that quite a lot of people that you might have thought mattered as human beings actually didn't. As the nightmare decade unfolded, the implications of this became clearer and clearer. And what he was warning against was the temptation of unconditional loyalty to a system, a programme, a "cause"

which was essentially about “me and people like me”. It’s about the danger of my agenda, our needs, the programme of this particular group, its safety and prosperity.

And Christmas is supremely the story of a God who is not interested in telling us about principles. First comes the action – God beginning to live a human life. Then comes the appeal: do you love and trust what you see in this human life, the life of Jesus? Then the implication: everyone is capable of saying yes to this appeal, so no one is dispensable. You don’t and can’t know where the boundary will lie between people who belong and people who don’t belong.

The 20th century built up quite a list of casualties around “principles” in Barth’s sense. Various philosophies solemnly assured us that the human cost is really worth it, because history will vindicate the sufferings and sacrifices of the present. Keep your nerve, don’t be distracted by the human face of suffering, because it will be all right in the end; we know it will because the principles are clear.

Fortunately the Western world has not for a long time seen the real horrors that this entails in terms of brutality and devastation. Yet we are not completely immune from appealing to “principles” in order to help us avoid some of the harsher consequences of our policies and preferences. They may in themselves be good and positive principles, not like the destructive ideologies of the past century. But we’re bound to be uncomfortably aware at the moment that what looked like a principled defence of some of our economic assumptions (this is what real wealth creation means and there is no other coherent way of defending it) seems more ragged and vulnerable than it once did.

The unprincipled question won’t be silenced: what about the particular human costs? What about the unique concerns and crises of the pensioner whose savings have disappeared, the Woolworths employee, the hopeful young executive, let alone the helpless producer of goods in some Third-World environment where prices are determined thousands of miles away?

People react impatiently to this, asking why religious believers should be taken seriously when they talk about economics. Fair enough. But the

whole point is that the believer doesn’t want to talk about economics, only to ask an “unprincipled” question – to make sure that principles don’t simply block out actual human faces and stories. How we make it all work is vastly complicated – no one is pretending it isn’t. But without these anxieties about the specific costs, we’ve lost the essential moral compass.

So Christmas doesn’t offer an alternative set of economic theories or even a social programme. It’s a story – the record of an event that began to change the entire framework in which we think about human life, so that the unique value of every life came to be affirmed and assumed.

Whether we realise it or not, the reason we are shocked by the mass killings under Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot, by the indifference of a Mugabe to raging poverty and epidemic, is because this story has made a difference to how our civilisation thinks about universal human dignity.

The God of the Christmas story (and the rest of the Gospels) doesn’t relate to us on the basis of any theory, but on the basis of unconditional love and welcome. That act of free love towards the entire human race changed things – even for those who didn’t and don’t share all the beliefs and doctrines of Christianity. And for those who do share those convictions, loving God and one another is a defiance of all programmes and principles designed to preserve only the wellbeing of people like us.

All of us, Christians most definitely included, have problems living up to this. But that’s one reason why we tell this story repeatedly, the story of the “unprincipled” God who values what others don’t notice, who relates to people we’d all rather forget, whose appeal is to everyone because he has made everyone capable of loving response. At least once a year we all – Christians or non-Christians – need to hear again that permission to be free from principles so that we can ask the question about specific human lives and destinies, about the unacceptable cost of programmes and systems when they are only about me and people like me.

And when that question is asked, says Karl Barth in his sermon, what begins to come through is “the eternal light that requires neither fuel nor candlestick”.

May this Christmas bring that light into all our lives, to light up every face we meet.

Trinitarian Theology After Barth **An International Symposium**

May 14-15, 2009

**Carey Baptist College
Penrose, Auckland, New Zealand**

Keynote Speakers:

- **Paul D. Molnar** (St. John's University, New York)
- **Bruce L. McCormack** (Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey)
- **Ivor Davidson** (Otago University, Dunedin)
- **Murray Rae** (Otago University, Dunedin)

Other Participants include:

Martin Sutherland, Nicola Hoggard Creegan, Andrew Burgess, Myk Habets, Adam McIntosh and Ben Myers.

David Fergusson, University of Edinburgh, George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary, Paul Molnar, St. John's University, and Iain Torrance of Princeton Theological Seminary all spoke at a meeting of the **Society of Biblical Literature** in Boston on November 23, 2008 remembering the legacy of **Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007)**. **George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary** spoke at the launching of the first volume of **Thomas F. Torrance's** Edinburgh lectures on

Christology, **The Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ** co-sponsored by InterVarsity Press and Pater Noster Press. **George Hunsinger** also spoke to a full house at the annual meeting of the **Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship** in Chicago on Friday afternoon, October 31, 2008. George presented a very illuminating and stimulating lecture entitled **Thomas F. Torrance's Theology of the Sacraments with Special Emphasis on the Eucharist**. In the lecture, Hunsinger discussed how he believes Torrance's thinking could help contribute to a view of the Eucharist that might be ecumenically acceptable to Protestants, Roman Catholics and Orthodox alike. His new book, **The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) presents his developed views on the subject. **John Webster, University of Aberdeen**, will speak about "T. F. Torrance on Scripture" at the next meeting of the **Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship** in **Montreal** on Friday afternoon November 6, 2009. More information will follow in the fall Newsletter.

ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES

Everyone interested in joining the **Karl Barth Society of North America** is invited to become a member by sending your name, address (including email address) and annual dues of \$20.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

Professor Paul D. Molnar
Editor, KBSNA Newsletter
Department of Theology
and Religious Studies
St. John Hall
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, New York 11439
Email: molnarp@stjohns.edu

Checks drawn on a U.S. bank should be made payable to the **Karl Barth Society of North America**

The Karl Barth Society of North America thanks all who have paid their dues for this year.